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C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 001426

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/16/2015

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: POLISARIO LEADER IS WORKING TO RELEASE MOROCCAN PRISONERS AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE

Classified By: Marc J. Sievers, Charges d'Affairs a.i.  
for reasons 1.4 (d)

1. (U) On July 16 Algerian French-language newspapers El Watan, Liberte and Expression, as well as the leading Arabic-language newspaper El Khabar quoted a July 14 article from French newspaper Le Monde stating that Polisario "President" Abdelaziz, on a diplomatic mission to Spain, announced his decision to release all of the Moroccan POWs "as quickly as possible". Le Monde also reported Abdelaziz as saying that the Sahrawis will inform the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) of the decision and work with them to sort out the technical details. There are currently 408 Moroccan POWs held by the Sahrawis in prisons located on Algerian territory. Some of the prisoners have been held for more than 20 years.

2. (C) PolEc Chief and Poloff met with ICRC Algerian representative Oliver Durr July 16 to ask whether the Polisario had approached the ICRC. Durr told Emboffs that the prisoner release has been in the works since mid-June and Sahrawi "Ambassador" to Algeria Bissat told him last week to "read the newspapers". Durr confirmed that the Polisario asked the ICRC to be ready for the prisoner release, but has not yet set a date. He commented that ICRC knew that something was "in the air" when a scheduled June 13 meeting between ICRC and the Polisario was canceled, and the desire for a prisoner release became more clear during a June 27-28 meeting with Abdelaziz. He did not have any additional details, since ICRC Tunis was responsible for the Western Sahara portfolio. Durr added that ICRC needed to be notified a week before the transfer to arrange the charter flights and medical personnel. He was not sure if the release was backed by international sponsors, such as France, Spain or the United States.

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